B. Permanence

Outcome P1: Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
Outcome P2: The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Trends

In general, tangible outcomes due to the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) have increased every year in Missouri since passage of the act in 1997. Specifically, adoptions have doubled from 724 in SFY-98 to 1,478 in SFY-02 and the out-of-home care population has generally stabilized. The juvenile courts in Missouri have become increasingly committed to meeting ASFA goals. The Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) has worked closely with the judicial circuits in education and training efforts, culminating in the "Bench Card" training conducted in 2003 by OCSA with the courts and Children's Division agency staff.

Policy and practice enhancements were made by the agency after passage of ASFA and permanency policy has remained relatively unchanged since that time. In the wake of the death of a child in foster care in August 2002, various commissions and task forces have examined the child welfare system in Missouri and have collectively produced 73 recommendations. Accordingly, child welfare law, policy and practice in Missouri are the threshold of significant change.

I. Foster Care Population Flow
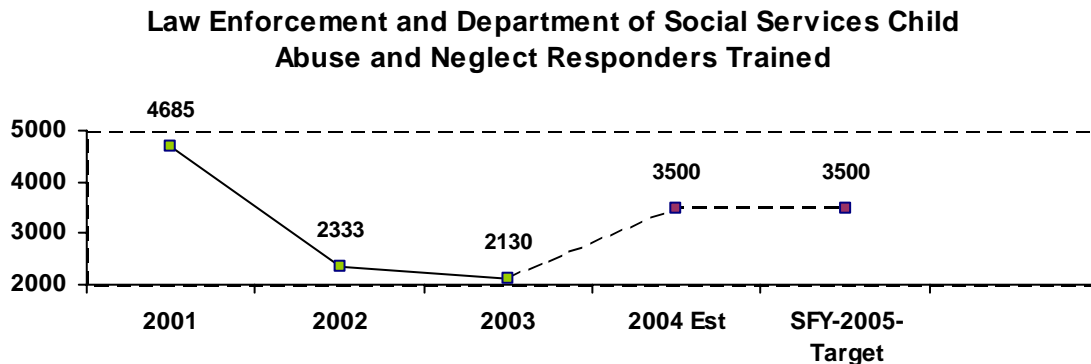### Point-in-Time Data Element I
Cohort Data Element I

The Point-In-Time Profile reports the out-of-home care population in Missouri decreased slightly from 13,181 children the last day of FFY-00 to 13,045 children the last day of FFY-02. This data includes children in legal status 1 (Children's Division custody), legal status 2 (temporary custody with adoptive parent), legal status 3 (supervision only) and legal status 4 (custody with another agency). Children in legal status 1 account for 12,000 of the 13,045 children identified in the FFY-02 Point-In-Time Profile. The inclusion of all four legal status groups in the Point-In-Time data has impact that will be noted in the various elements of this section.

The Point-In Time Profile data indicates admissions remained relatively constant over the three-year period from 2000 to 2002. The number of discharges increased during this period, most likely due to the increase in adoption finalizations. The net change in the number of children in care decreased steadily from 1,707 children in FFY-00 to 907 children in FFY-02.

- In Missouri, the child welfare staff does not have the legal authority to take "protective custody" of children. Juvenile court staff, law enforcement and physicians (under certain conditions) have that power. All children taken into protective custody must be referred to the juvenile court and must have an order

issued to remain in custody. While child welfare staff and their partners work together closely to determine the best interests of children, the child welfare system has limited authority over decisions on children entering care. The chart below indicates the number of law enforcement and Children's Division investigators who received unique child abuse training. There are plans to increase the number trained in SFY-04 and SFY-05.

Law Enforcement and Department of Social Services Child Abuse and Neglect Responders Trained

Year	Number Trained
2001	4685
2002	2333
2003	2130
2004 Est	3500
SFY-2005-Target	3500

- Missouri receives children placed in agency custody for reasons other than child abuse and neglect. As noted earlier in the safety section, the child welfare system receives and responds to many calls that do not rise to the standard of abuse/neglect reports and a number of these cases are opened for child protective services.

- The mental health system in Missouri has very limited resources for placing children in residential care. The new "System of Care" initiative supported by both the Missouri governor and legislature has the goal of improving interagency coordination and better matching youth to the agency most suitable for their needs. Collaboration efforts are now under way to better address this issue.

- The juvenile corrections agency, the Division of Youth Services (DYS), can only serve youth who are "committed" by the juvenile court for delinquency acts. Some juvenile courts prefer to send youth who have not committed serious crimes to the child welfare system, where the agency is given custody to purchase residential care for the child under the jurisdiction of the courts.

- Missouri has a strong Intensive In-home Services (IIS) Program, which is a major safeguard in assuring safety while keeping families intact. The IIS program, however, does not always have the capacity to serve all the identified families needing the service at a point in time.

Placement Types for Children in Foster Care
Point-In-Time Data Element I & II
Cohort Data Element II

The Point-in-Time Permanency Profile for Missouri reflects several changes over the three years in placement types for children in care. The number of children in pre-adoptive homes increased from FFY 2000 to FFY 2001 from 10.3% of the children to 10.8% but dropped again in 2002 to 10.4%. The number of children in relative foster homes decreased from 24.0% in FFY 2000 to 21.6% in FFY 2001 and to 20.7% in 2002. Decreases are also seen in children placed in non-relative foster homes from 37.1% in 2000, to 32.6% in 2002. Placements in Group Homes dropped from 1.5% in 2000 to 1.1% in 2002. In 2000, 16.8% of all children in the Point-In Time Profile were in institutional care, but in 2002, the percentage of children had fallen to 14.3%. There is an increase of children in trial home visit placements from 5.4% in 2000 to 8.0% in 2002.

Placement Types for Children in Care

	FFY-00	FFY-01	FFY-02
Pre-Adoptive Homes	1,363	1,448	1,362
Foster Family Homes (Relative)	3,166	2,884	2,706
Foster Family Homes (Non-Relative)	4,895	5,043	4,249
Group Homes	196	196	141
Institutions	2,208	2,263	1,869
Supervised Independent Living	204	387	443
Trial Home Visit	715	793	1,042

- The increase in trial home visits is a positive trend in ASFA implementation. While basic policies and practices have not changed fundamentally over the 2000-2002 time period, court and child welfare staff have become more proficient with implementation and have increasingly relied on trial home visits as another assessment of the readiness of the family for the return of the children.

- Missouri has a wide range of placement options in the foster family home settings, including family group foster care and two levels of therapeutic foster care, behavioral foster care (BFC) and career foster care (CFC). The placement policies and practices encourage the least restrictive placement for a child, with special emphasis given to kinship placements. Development of the STARS for the Caregiver curriculum assists kinship providers in becoming licensed foster parents who are then eligible for the foster care maintenance payment for a specified child. Efforts to encourage and support kinship placements continue.

- Therapeutic foster care in Missouri has largely been developed and supervised by the Division. In August 2003, 904 children were in therapeutic foster care compared to 1,869 children in institutions per the 2002 profile data. Efforts are

now underway with the private sector to increase recruitment and support for therapeutic foster care homes, which would offer alternatives for less restrictive environments to more children. The agency's foster care case management contract was amended effective July 1, 2003, to allow for the recruitment, training, and assessment of foster families who are willing to accept children between 16 and 18 years of age and placed in a residential treatment facility. In addition, agencies are expected to provide case management services geared toward maintaining the child in their foster home placement unless there is a permanency option appropriate for the child. Of the 21 agencies that were given the opportunity to provide these services, 13 agencies chose to sign the amendment.

- A number of factors have impacted the changes in the number of children placed in institutions. The Family-to-Family Grant was awarded to St. Louis City in 2001 and the Missouri Results Initiative (MRI) began studying issues in 2001 and provided recommendations in 2002. Both groups emphasized decreasing the numbers of small children (ages 0-10) in residential care and the system over-reliance on residential care, especially in St. Louis City and St. Louis County. The recommendations included shifting funds used for residential funding to therapeutic homes. Accordingly, a team of agency staff and community partners in St. Louis developed strategies beginning in 2002 to reduce residential care placements. Strategies included close monitoring by top managers of residential care entries and exits, two levels of supervisory approval for entries, efforts to increase therapeutic foster care placements and team staffings for the children in residential care to identify appropriate alternative placements. The results were significant, with residential care for children 0-10 years in the St Louis metro area declining from 178 children in June 2002 to 88 children in July of 2003. These recommendations were made to statewide staff and similar efforts were made in other counties and circuits of the state. Statewide, the number of children of children ages 0-10 in residential care declined from 322 in June of 2002 to 218 in July 2003.

- Other innovations addressing residential care occurred with Missouri's Interdepartmental Initiative requested funds from both the Departments of Mental Health and Social Services in a pilot project using a managed care approach to achieving a stable placement for youth in a less restrictive setting. The Missouri Alliance for Children and Families is providing this service through a contract with the Department of Social Services in central and eastern Missouri. The Missouri Alliance supports community-based alternatives for seriously emotionally disturbed children at risk of being placed or already placed in structured residential settings. Through this program children are given the opportunity to live with families or live independently in a permanent setting. After the youth is stable in a family setting and child are stable or in a semi-independent situation, the Alliance transitions the coordination of the care back to the referring agency.

- The trend of reducing the numbers of young children in residential care has required a "culture change" from established providers serving that age group. The various initiatives noted above have offered providers more opportunities to develop a comprehensive continuum of care for children of all ages and has resulted in a reduction of children in institutional care.

Permanency Goals for Children in Foster Care
Point-in-Time Data Elements III & VIII
Cohort Data Elements III & V

Changes in the goals in both Permanency Profiles were relatively stable over the three-year time period with the exception of the increase in the goal of Reunification, which increased from 53.8% of the children in care in 2000 to 58.3% in 2002. Reunifications increased 9% in the Point-In-Time Profile from 3,334 children in 2000 to 3,592 children in 2002. The median months to discharge to reunification increased from 5.8 months to 7.7 months. In the Cohort data, a relatively stable 86% of children were discharged to reunification/relative placement. Adoption *placements* increased from 1.6% of children in care in 2000 to 2.7% in 2002. Guardianship *placements* increased from 2.5% of children in care in 2000 to 3.9% in 2002.

Permanency Goals for Children in Care

	FFY-00	FFY-01	FFY-02
Reunification	7,096	7,587	7,610
Live with Other Relatives	227	227	193
Adoption	2,881	2,698	2,624
Long Term Foster Care	403	377	363
Emancipation	1,155	1,162	1,179
Guardianship	997	865	696

- Child welfare policies and practices require a Family Support Team (FST) meeting every 30 days until adjudication and at least every six months after adjudication. It has been shown that regular and effective FST meetings enhance timely movement toward the goal for the child and should be utilized extensively. Missouri's system data shows that this requirement is met only approximately 62.0% of the time. It is believed that staff under report the occurrence of the Family Support Team meetings. Enhancements to the automated system to better track, remind, and provide written notices of Family Support Team meetings has been recommended and will be pursued.

- The juvenile courts in Missouri are required to conduct permanency hearings within the first 12 months of placement and at least annually thereafter. Several judicial circuits have increased the frequency of permanency hearings to every six months, or even every three months in order to expedite permanency for children.

- There are a number of quality assurance tools within the child welfare system to track and monitor permanency. Missouri's child welfare outcome reports are produced every quarter per circuit on a number of indicators, including all of the federal permanency standards. The Children's Division management report is produced monthly with data for each county on the numbers of children in alternative care, entries, exits and other information. This data is reviewed by the Quality Assurance Teams quarterly at the local, regional and statewide levels. Finally, the Peer Record Review data is collected quarterly and results are shared with staff. The data includes information on case reviews, case plans, concurrent planning, visitation, termination of parental rights filing per ASFA guidelines, and other permanency factors. These tracking and monitoring devices aid staff and administrators in striving for timely permanence.

- The Missouri Resource Guide for Best Practices in Child Abuse and Neglect Cases Timelines contains practices and policies developed by the Office of State Courts Administrator (OSCA) and are an excellent resource. The Resource Guide is designed to complement, not replace, state and federal statutes and court rules. The Best Practices Recommendations are offered to assist courts in their efforts to improve court practice in child abuse and neglect cases. These policies and practices appear to have the potential for considerable positive impact on permanency achievement. The 2003 training with the participation of child welfare staff and juvenile court staff was very well received.

Achievement of Reunification
Point-in-Time Data Elements IX

The Missouri child welfare system did not conform to the federal standard of reunifying children with their families 76.2% or more of the time within 12 months for the period reviewed. In 2000, 68% of the children in Missouri were reunified in 12 months, in 2001 65.6% of the children were reunified in 12 months and in 2002, 65.9% (September 30, 2003 Data Profile). The decline in timely reunification percentages coincide with the period of staff shortages in 2001. The data shows, however, the number of children who were reunified increased from 2,290 children in 2000 to 2,374 children in 2002.

Percent of Children Reunified within 12 Months by Race
SFY 2003

Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic
67.1%	66.6%	84%

Percent of Children Reunified within 12 Months by Age
SFY-03

0-5	6-12	13+
77.6%	65.2%	60%

- The increases in trial home visits are a very positive note. The Point-In-Time Permanency Profile, which includes children not in DFS custody, shows a 2.5% increase over the FFY 2000-2002 periods. The Cohort Profile, which includes only those children in the Division's custody, shows a 5% increase. This trend suggests that the Missouri child welfare system is improving its reunification efforts by utilizing the opportunity of trial home visits.

Percentage of Children in the Division's Custody in Trial Home Visit
Placement

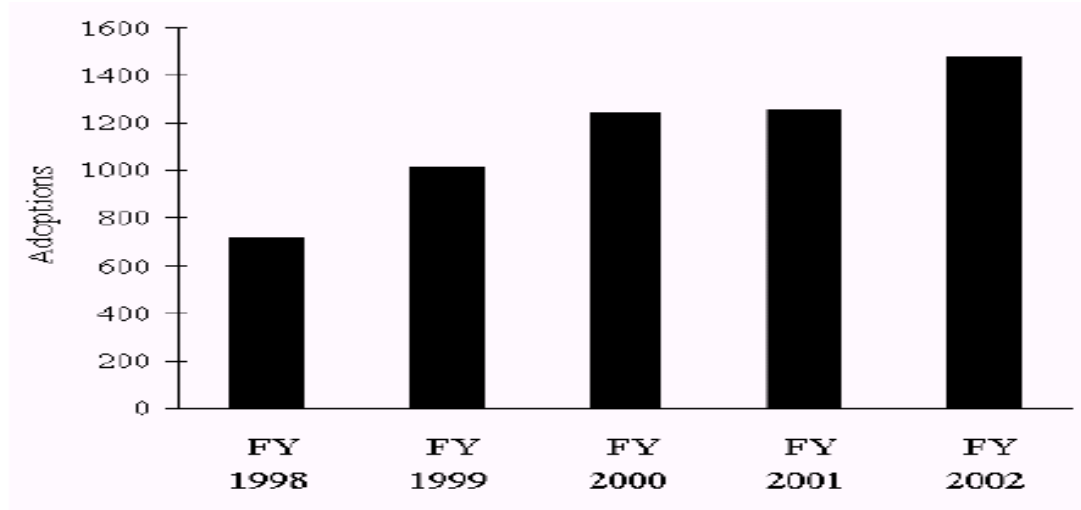| FFY-00	FFY-01	FFY-02
5.4%	5.9%	8.0%

- The child welfare system has many positive elements in place to move children back home more rapidly and more effectively. The child welfare policies are thorough, detailed and based on best practice. Both the juvenile court system and the child welfare agency have embraced ASFA and improvements are visible with increasing numbers of children adopted and reunified. The child welfare agency has a number of Quality Assurance practices and outcome measures in place. At this point in time, adequate staffing appears to be the single greatest deterrent to achieving the federal standard with timely reunification. Staff are simply spread too thin to focus their efforts on children entering care and their families in the way necessary to achieve timely results.

- Missouri's data system does not adequately measure the correlation between the number of services, type of services and/or the length of services provided to families and the achievement of early reunification. The Peer Record Review Results, however, clearly indicate that assessment, service plans and service delivery are areas needing improvement. This weakness appears to be both a capacity issue and a training issue.

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Achievement of Adoption
Point-in-Time Data Element X

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Adoption outcomes are very positive for the Missouri child welfare system. The federal standard for the percent of children who exited care to a finalized adoption within 24 months is 32 % or more. The Point-in-Time Profile shows 30.3% (September 30, 2003 Data Profile) of Missouri's children did not meet this outcome goal. Significant increases in the percent of children adopted within the 24-month time frame are shown. In FFY

2000 Missouri's number was 24% of the children in care and in 2001 it was 29.3%. During this same evaluation period, the total number of adoptions increased from 1,076 in 2000 to 1,337 in 2002.

Adoptions Finalized
FY 1998 - 2002

As the chart indicates, the number of adoptions finalized had a steady increase from SFY-98 to SFY-02.

- Some of the factors that have likely impacted adoption were discussed earlier, particularly the improved agency/court implementation of ASFA and the resources for recruitment and training provided in 2001 by the Adoption Opportunities grant. Additionally, the agency began posting children nationally for adoption through the Adopt Kids USA web site in 1999.

- Adoption practices were also enhanced in 1999 with creation of the statewide Second Level Matching Team (SLM), which brings representatives from around the state together to find homes for children needing an adoptive home. The original intent of the SLM team was to erase geographical barriers in providing permanent homes for children by working collaboratively and to update adoptive family records across the state. This team also includes providing a forum for out of state families wishing to be considered for Missouri children. As the SLM team has progressed, they have begun to address general adoption issues faced by local staff and are helping to define best adoption practice across the state. These practices have contributed to the improvements in timeliness of adoption completions.

- As noted earlier, age, race and special needs continue to impact adoption. Based on Missouri's child welfare outcome measure, Caucasian children were adopted within 24 months 41.4% of the time, African-American children 34.5% of the time and Hispanic children 50% of the time. Children 0-5 were adopted within 24 months 56% of the time, children 6-12 were adopted 27% of the time and children 13+ 22% of the time. As of August 2003, Missouri had approximately 2000 children waiting for an adoptive home. Staff shortages have decreased the capacity to recruit one-on-one for a particular child, which is important in finding

families for the hard to place population. Both staff resources and staff training are necessary to achieve permanency outcomes for children waiting for an adoptive family.

Percent of Children Adopted within 24 Months by Race
SFY-03

Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic
41.4%	34.5%	50%

Percent of Children Adopted within 24 Months by Age
SFY-03

0-5	6-12	13+
56%	27%	22%

- Age, children with special needs, and sibling groups can be barriers to permanency. Adolescents are a particularly challenging age group due to the lack of adoptive resources, especially for youth who have been in out-of-home care a long time and have little contact with parents or relatives. Missouri is involved in a variety of recruitment activities to serve the diverse population of children in alternative care and has awarded contracts to private agency providers to conduct recruitment, training, and assessments of homes for special needs children. The contractors have been given the demographic information regarding the children for whom the agency is seeking permanent homes, with a focus on older children, minority children, and children who are part of a sibling group, and children who have serious emotional disturbances or are medically fragile. Missouri is in its second year of an Adoption Opportunities Grant, partnering with the Adoption Exchange to focus on recruitment of families for minority children. The Adoption Exchange strategically based their Missouri office in St. Louis where there is a significant number of minority children waiting for permanent families. It is anticipated that this program will significantly increase the number of adoptive families allowing adoption placement to occur in a much more timely manner.

Termination of Parental Rights (TPR)
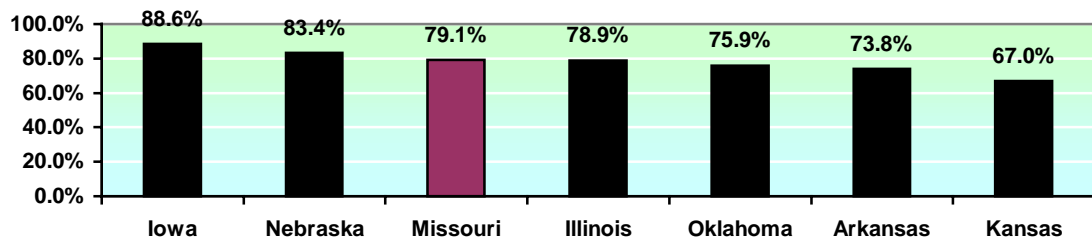**Point-in-Time Data Element VI**

According to the Point-in-Time Profile, the percentage of Missouri children in care 17 of the most recent 22 months remained relatively stable from 43.2% in 2000 to 42.9% in 2002. As noted in the Footnotes to Data Elements in the Permanency Profile, the 17 of the most recent 22 months was designated rather than the statutory time frame for initiating termination of parent rights proceedings since the AFCARS system cannot determine the date the child is considered to have entered foster care as defined in the regulation.

- Practices regarding termination of parental rights continue to vary among the juvenile courts in the state. Some juvenile courts prefer to file termination of parental rights only after a prospective adoptive family has been identified. A major system enhancement in Missouri has been the development of the Missouri Resource Guide for Best Practices in Child Abuse and Neglect Case Timelines by the Office of State Court Administrators (OSCA). "Benchmark" training based on this manual occurred with child protection staff and juvenile court staff across the state in 2003. This training should enhance efforts to seek termination of parental rights through the courts in a more timely manner.

- The Juvenile Court Improvement Project exists in three judicial circuits in Missouri—the 2nd, 22nd and 23rd circuits. This project provides mandatory time frames for conducting juvenile court hearings that exceed the requirements outlined by AFSA. For example, review hearings must be held as often as necessary or desirable, but at least once every ninety days after disposition and prior to the permanency planning hearing. Numerous other circuits across the state have adopted the recommended timeframes, typically the frequent judicial reviews and mandatory protective custody hearings. The increased attention these timeframes bring to bear on the importance of timely permanence is certainly a positive step toward meeting AFSA time frames for TPR filings.

- Child welfare policies regarding ASFA implementation are detailed, thorough and specific. Staff has been trained in ASFA requirements.

- Missouri has statutes that support ASFA principles. For example, Revised Statute of MO 211.183 clarifies when reasonable efforts are not required for termination of parental rights, including situations of prior serious abuse by a parent.

- In Missouri, juvenile court officers typically file the petitions for termination of parental rights. Agency staff has access to Department of Social Services attorneys who prepare petitions for TPR on some cases. Foster parents may also file termination of parental rights petitions on behalf of children in their care.

Stability of Foster Care Placements
Point-in-Time Data Elements IV & XI
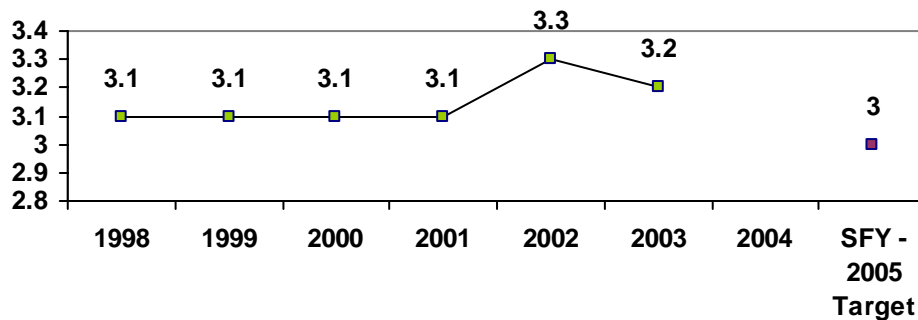**Cohort Data Element IV**

The Point-In-Time Profile reports the Missouri child welfare system failed to conform with the federal standard of 86.7% or more for children entering the system in the last 12 months having no more than two moves. Specifically, the Point-In-Time Profile indicates a downward trend, from 79.1% in 2000 to 76% in 2002. The September 30, 2003 Profile Data shows this percentage to be 78.7%. The Cohort Profile mirrored the downward trend, with 74.9% of children experiencing less than two moves during the first year in 2000 to 68.8% in 2002.

Percent of Children with Two or Fewer Placements within 12 Months FFY 2000

	Iowa	Nebraska	Missouri	Illinois	Oklahoma	Arkansas	Kansas
	88.6%	83.4%	79.1%	78.9%	75.9%	73.8%	67.0%

- Missouri has traditionally been rated as one of the lowest in the nation for basic maintenance payments to foster parents (approximately $227 to $307 monthly, depending on age of child). Particularly with the downturn in the economy in Missouri, fewer families are able to supplement the maintenance payments from their own funds.

Average Number of Moves While in Alternative Care

1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	SFY - 2005 Target
3.1	3.1	3.1	3.1	3.3	3.2		3

- Child welfare policy encourages appropriate matching of children with families and does not require "evaluation" homes. However, with many parts of the state lacking available foster home resources, emergency foster home care and emergency residential care is frequently utilized. These placement types are limited to 30 days, but may contribute to an increased number of moves for children.

Three sites in Missouri are currently piloting an innovative approach for stability and safety that helps staff better match foster homes with the child and assists staff in more effectively evaluating what is occurring in the foster home. Missouri purchased the Confirming Safe Environments curriculum, developed by ACTION for Child Protection and received consultation on this curriculum from the National Resource Center for Child Maltreatment. This curriculum:

- assists staff in identifying and providing rationale for standards of care associated with kinship and foster care
- describes a specific work process designed to confirm and maintain child safety while in placement
- demonstrates information collection skills and methods related to critical attributes of a safe environment
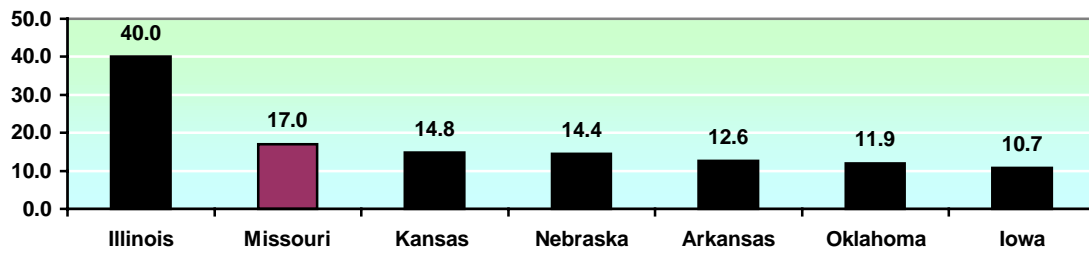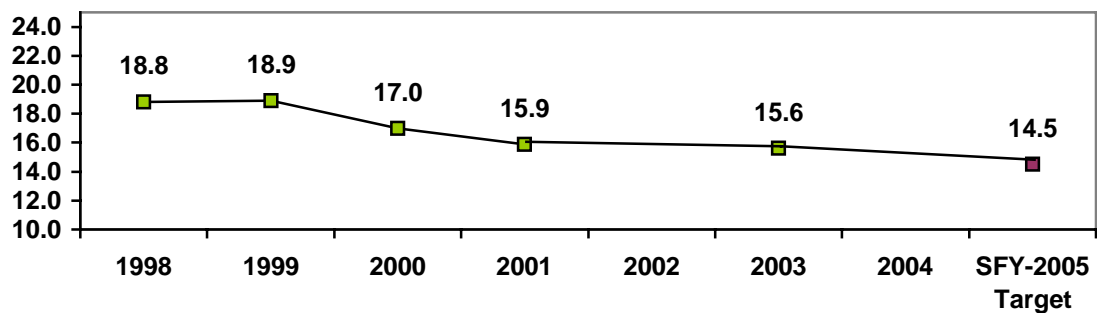- teaches how to complete an analysis of a safe environment

Information and data from the test sites is currently being reviewed for consideration of future use. A barrier to implementation statewide will be staff capacity, as the model emphasizes staff spending more time with the foster family and coordinating the efforts by all the parties dealing with the family and child.

Foster Care Re-Entries
Point-in-Time Data Elements V & XII

The September 30, 2003 Profile Data shows the 2002 percentage to be 8.5%, which would mean that Missouri does, indeed, conform to the federal standard of less that 8.6%. Actual numbers of children reunified increased from 3,334 to 3,592 over this time period.

Length of Stay in Foster Care
Point-in-Time Data Element VII
Cohort Data Element VI

The Point-in-Time Data Element reports that Missouri has decreased the Median Length of Stay in Foster Care from 17.0 months in FFY-00 to 15.9 months in FFY-01 and 15.8 months FFY-02. The First Time Entry Cohort Data Element reports the Median Length of Stay in Foster Care to have remained constant at 15.9 for two years (2000 & 2001). Missouri's Child Welfare Outcomes Measures for only children in DFS custody (legal status 1) in out of home care also indicates a constant level of approximately 14+ months median length of stay over SFY-02 and SFY-03. The median length of stay in care for children exiting to adoption has decreased from 35.9 months in FFY-00 to 31.5 months in FFY-02. The median length of stay in care for children exiting to guardianship has decreased from 19.8 months in FFY-00 to 17.8 months in FFY-02. At the same time, the median length of stay in care for children exiting to reunification has increased from 5.8 months in FFY-00 to 7.7 months in FFY-02.

Median Length of Stay in Foster Care in FFY-2000

Median Length of Stay in Foster Care

Other Permanency Issues

- Many of the 73 recommendations from the commissions and task forces who have studied the child welfare system would directly impact out-of-home care.